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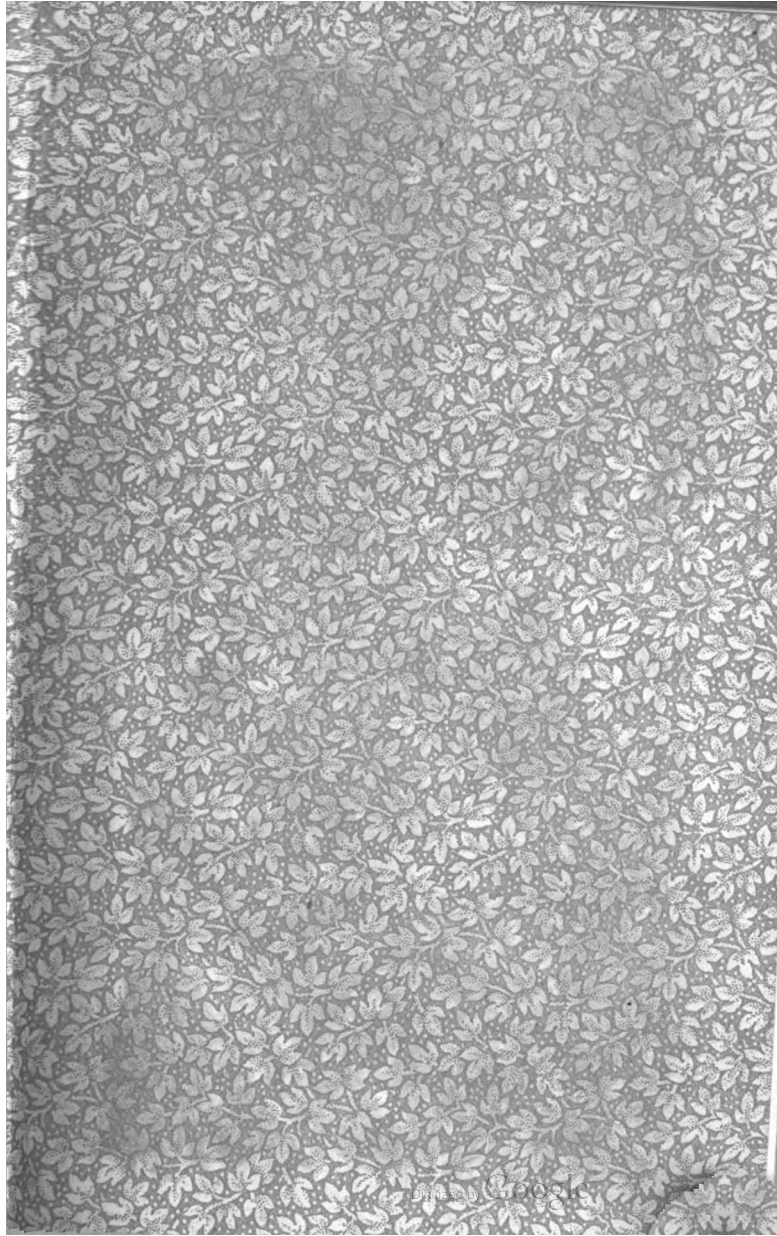
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**Rose
Fortescue; or,
The devout
client of our
Lady of ...**

**Laetitia Selwyn
Oliver**

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ROSE FORTESCUE.

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OR,

THE DEVOUT CLIENT OF OUR LADY
OF DOLOURS.

BY

LÆTITIA OLIVER,

AUTHOR OF 'FATHER PLACID, OR THE CUSTODIAN OF THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT.'



R. WASHBOURNE,
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1884.





ROSE FORTESCUE;

OR,

THE DEVOUT CLIENT OF OUR LADY
OF DOLOURS.



CHAPTER I.

ONE hot day in August, two little children were sitting in the shade of some of the large beech-trees on the smooth, well-kept lawn of Fernleigh Manor. The elder of the two, a dark-eyed, intelligent girl of seven years old, looked the picture of discontent, and cast uneasy looks in the direction of her cousin, a fairy-like, golden-haired child, a year younger, who was nursing a large wax doll with the utmost satisfaction.

At a little distance sat their nurse, a quiet, respectable woman of middle age, who was busy knitting a stocking, now and then raising her eyes to her young charges. The dark-eyed child, after watching her little companion's movements with considerable impatience, at length called out :

‘That doll is mine, and I want to have it back ; give it to me, Edith !’

‘It is not yours, it is mine now,’ replied Edith defiantly, ‘and I mean to keep it.’

‘It is mine,’ replied the other very angrily. ‘Leonard gave it me a year ago, and I have kept it so carefully since. You *shall* give it up !’

‘For shame, Miss Rose,’ said the nurse, rising to go in, ‘let your cousin have it a bit longer ; and now both of you be good children whilst I go in and see about tea.’

There was silence for about five minutes after nurse had left, then Rose called out :

‘You are holding my doll’s face in

the sun ; it will make her ill ; do sit more in the shade.'

'The sun will do her good,' answered Edith, without moving an inch ; 'she has got a cold, and the sun will warm her.'

'It will not do her any good—it will hurt her beautiful pink cheeks,' replied Rose, half crying. 'See, the wax is getting quite soft ; it seems all covered with blisters ; *do* move !'

'I won't move,' said Edith ; 'I like the sun.'

This was too much for the fast diminishing patience of little Rose ; she started up and exclaimed :

'Then you shall not have her another moment,' and seizing hold of the doll, she endeavoured to drag it from Edith's arms.

A struggle ensued between the two children, both equally determined to have possession of the wax baby, which till now had been the pride of Rose's heart. The contest soon produced deplorable results : first a wax arm, then a wax leg

was broken, whilst a stream of bran issued from a rent in its body. Rose was at last victorious : she succeeded in dragging her treasure from her cousin's arms ; but, as she did so, Edith, with a fiendish look of triumph, contrived to smash in the already melting face of the no longer beautiful doll. Rose uttered a cry of vengeance, and raising her arm, struck her little companion with all the force she could command.

‘Miss Rose, how dare you !’ cried the sharp voice of the nurse, who had returned unperceived ; ‘go into the house this minute, and do not come out again till you are really sorry, and can promise to behave better.’

Rose darted away, quivering all over with passion, carrying with her the mutilated remains of her still precious doll. She entered the hall, but instead of going to the nursery, or to her own bedroom, she turned down a long passage, and, raising a heavy curtain, softly lifted the latch of the door concealed behind it, and passed into the chapel. It was a

simple, unpretending little building, possessing no architectural beauty ; its altar was of plain wood, surmounted by a modern picture of no particular merit, representing the Crucifixion. There were no stained - glass windows, no bright flowers, no signs of its being much frequented ; only the small silver lamp suspended from the roof told of the presence of the silent and unseen Dweller in the Tabernacle. But it was not to the Tabernacle that little Rose turned ; at the entrance of the chapel there was depicted in stone Our Lady of Dolours, holding in her tender arms the bruised and wounded body of her Divine and crucified Son.

The countenance of that desolate Mother of Sorrows was the very ideal of grief, anguish, and affliction, blended with a touching resignation to the will of the Eternal Father. It was the perfect realization of those words of the *Stabat Mater* :

‘ *Cujus animam gementem,
Contristatam, et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.*

‘O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti.’

Under the feet of the Blessed Virgin was inscribed a sentence from the Lamentations of Jeremias: ‘Oh, all you that pass by the way, attend and see if there be sorrow like to my sorrow.’ It was to this lovely and touching group that the little girl bent her steps, as she had often done before; it was at the feet of Our Lady of Sorrows that she flung herself in her childish grief, weeping and sobbing bitterly.

It was long before the fit of passion gave place to softer feelings; at last her tears began to flow more gently, her bosom ceased to heave; then she raised her eyes lovingly to that sweet Mother’s face, and showed her the mangled body of her doll, pouring out her tale of woe with as much simplicity as if the statue could really see and hear. Soon, very soon, repentance came, and, clasping her little hands together, she repeated a simple act of contrition, adding at the

end, 'Dear Mother of Sorrows, I am sorry for having hurt your Divine Son, and I do forgive Edith now.' Then, climbing up to the statue, half kneeling, half sitting by the Blessed Virgin's side on the broad marble slab, she laid her head against that Mother's knee, and, worn out with her transitory fit of passion, she fell fast asleep. There, two hours later, she was found by the nurse, who, becoming alarmed at her prolonged absence, had been seeking her all over the house.

CHAPTER II.

TWELVE years with their joys and their sorrows have glided swiftly away, and once more we stand in the garden of Fernleigh Manor; but the whole aspect of the place has changed since last we saw it. It is the first of February; the sun indeed is shining brightly, but the green lawn now presents a white, unbroken surface; the fine beech-trees are

laden with snow, and instead of the oppressive atmosphere of August, we feel the sharp exhilarating air of a frosty day. The occupants of the garden are also changed; the two little children we saw before are no longer there; instead, there is a grey-haired, sallow-looking gentleman, in a luxuriously cushioned bath-chair, who is being drawn up and down the carefully swept drive by a foreign-looking man-servant, whilst walking by his side is a tall, graceful, dark-eyed girl of nineteen, her hands full of snowdrops.

‘They are for the chapel to-morrow, father,’ she is saying; ‘it is the Feast of the Purification, you know; I do so hope that Leonard will think of sending me some flowers from the Park; I was in the hothouses yesterday, and saw such lovely plants.’

‘Oh, Leonard will remember nothing now; the grand places he has seen will have made him forgetful of his old friends,’ said her father.

‘How can you say so?’ replied Rose,

a little indignantly; 'he is always so thoughtful for us in every way; and as to the flowers, he can only have got back late last night; he will not have had time to send them over—they will come later on, I know.'

'Hark!' she cried, after a moment's pause, 'I hear his horse on the high-road now; let us go to the gate and meet him.'

They had but just got to the end of the drive when the horse and its rider, followed by a groom, galloped up, and a young man of most pleasing appearance sprang from the saddle, and giving the horse to his servant, warmly greeted the little group assembled to give him welcome.

'Dear Rose, how are you? but I need not ask—I see you are as blooming as ever. General Fortescue,' bending over the invalid in the chair, and taking his hand with the affection of a son, 'I hope you are feeling a little stronger. Gustave, how do you do?' to the servant in the background. 'Oh, how delightful it is to be at home again!'

‘You still call this home, my boy, said General Fortescue, his face lighting up with pleasure; ‘why, you should call Northcliffe Park your home now.’

‘I am very fond of the Park,’ answered Leonard quickly, ‘but still, *this* will always seem to me my real home; after living here fourteen years, off and on, I think I have a right to call it so.’

‘You have, you have, my dear boy,’ said General Fortescue. ‘I hope you will call it by no other name.’

‘And after all you have seen abroad,’ said Rose, ‘does this place still appear as charming as ever to you?’

‘A thousand times more so,’ he answered; ‘all the beauties I have seen in Italy have only made me appreciate my own country more. I am a thorough Englishman still, you see, my little sister.’

‘You are the same as ever,’ said Rose, delighted. ‘I began to fear, from the enthusiastic descriptions in your letters, that you would return quite discontented with the Park and the Manor House;

and you know,' she added, 'the Park is my *beau idéal* of a little earthly paradise.'

'I have the vanity to think it as near perfection as can be,' said Leonard, smiling; 'but I am a partial judge, so my opinion goes for nothing. I have not forgotten your flowers for the chapel. I gave Richardson orders to send you the very best he had; some of your favourite white camellias particularly; they will be down in an hour's time.'

'Thank you so much, dear Leonard,' answered Rose warmly, 'I knew you would send them; now you will remain to luncheon, and help me to arrange the chapel afterwards.'

'That is the very thing I had intended,' he replied; 'I shall be very glad to help you.'

'Let us go in at once,' said the General; 'it only wants ten minutes to luncheon time, and I have to write a letter before then.'

Gustave wheeled the chair on, whilst the two young people followed behind.

‘How is your mother?’ asked Leonard, in a low voice.

‘No better,’ she replied, in the same tone; ‘rather worse, if anything; we do all we can to amuse and interest her, but nothing succeeds.’

‘Would it not be much better if she returned to the same asylum she was in before?’ asked Leonard.

‘I almost think it would be better for her,’ answered Rose, ‘I fear that she finds our presence an irksome restraint at times.’

‘And for yourself,’ he said, ‘would it not be a relief if she were gone?’

‘I must not think of myself,’ answered Rose quietly; ‘my father wishes to have her at home, so it must be right, and in the meantime I do the best I can.’

‘Always brave, ‘determined, and forgetful of self,’ said Leonard, smiling; ‘you are unchanged, Rose. I wish I could do more to help you; your lot is certainly a hard one.’

‘It might be a great deal harder than it is,’ said Rose, a bright colour coming

into her cheeks and making her look for the moment almost beautiful.

‘Will you help my father out of his chair? He fancies no one lifts him as well as yourself.’

An hour later, as the little party sat at the luncheon table, Leonard said :

‘There is an arrival in the neighbourhood which will perhaps interest you. Can you guess who it is?’

‘No one who will come and call here, I hope,’ said General Fortescue, who, like most invalids, had a horror of visitors, and had for the last two years steadily refused to receive any guest, save Leonard.

‘Some one who is certain to call,’ replied the young man; ‘you have not forgotten the little vixen who spoilt your doll, Rose.’

‘My cousin, Edith Harrington?’ said Rose; ‘is she really staying near here?’

‘She arrived yesterday at Farnborough Hall,’ replied Leonard; ‘she is staying with her friend, Lady Foster. I hardly

knew if you would be glad to see her or not.'

'Oh, I have quite forgiven our childish quarrels,' said Rose, laughing; 'but it is strange how unhappy she used to render me; she seemed to take a pleasure in trying to make me behave badly; but no doubt she is very much altered since then.'

'I have heard that she is very beautiful,' rejoined Leonard, 'and has broken ever so many hearts already.'

'I am sure we do not want her to come here and break any of ours,' said the General, a cloud passing over his face.

'Farnborough is an hour off by train, so she will not come over often, I dare say,' said Rose. 'Is it not a wonder, Leonard, that Edith and I, being first cousins, have never met since that summer when she came to stay here, twelve years ago? I long to see her; she was pretty and fascinating at six years old—what must she be now, at eighteen?'

'She is not a Catholic, I think,' said Leonard.

‘No,’ said General Fortescue; ‘my sister would marry a Protestant, and the consequence is, her child is one also. I always told her that the marriage was a fearful mistake; she sees it now, when it is too late. I did the best I could to prevent it, but I might have spared myself the trouble. The difference of religion always made me afraid of letting the two children be much together, so there has been no intercourse between them for many years. I think,’ he added, ‘I will have my usual sleep now, Rose, and you can go and arrange the flowers in the chapel with Leonard.’

The young girl placed a cushion behind her father’s head, put a footstool at his feet, partly lowered the blind, and after drawing a screen between him and the draught from the door, quietly left the room, followed by Leonard.

CHAPTER III.

ROSE was the only child of General and Mrs. Fortescue. The General belonged to an ancient family well known in the county of H——; he had passed a great part of his life in the Indian Army, and on his return to England, about twenty years previous to the present time, had married an amiable and accomplished woman. He began his home-life with every prospect of happiness; but, alas for human foresight! a year after his marriage little Rose was born, and after her birth the mother fell ill, and continued in a precarious state of health for about a year, when she entirely lost her reason, and had for many years to be confined in a private asylum.

Rose became, in consequence, the object of her father's dislike; he looked on her as the innocent cause of her mother's insanity, and for several years he scarcely took any notice of her; weeks, nay, even months would fly by,

and he never saw or spoke to the poor child, who was left entirely to the tender mercies of the servants. Deprived of a mother's love, an object of dislike to her father, her life would have been sad indeed, but for a happy dispensation of Providence, which provided her with a friend and companion. When Rose was about three years old, her father's great friend, Sir Richard Vernon, died, leaving him guardian of his only son. Leonard was only eight years old, and far too delicate at the time to be sent to school ; General Fortescue received the boy at once into his house, and gave him a father's love and care, bestowing on him the affection which he felt unable to give to his own child.

Leonard became at once the friend and playfellow of the desolate child ; he called her his little sister, and with a quickness far in advance of his age, perceiving the sad position she was in, he made it the object of his life to make her happy. They played and walked hand-in-hand together over the wild moors and shady

lanes in summer; he would read for hours aloud to her in the long winter evenings, or tell her weird stories of ghosts and hobgoblins. General Fortescue himself undertook his education, and the boy made rapid progress under his kind teacher; when Rose grew older, Leonard persuaded his guardian to allow the little girl to join his studies, so the two children were educated together, and Rose learnt Latin and mathematics, as well as French and German, side by side with her brother, as she called him, till Leonard was fourteen, when he was sent to college. This was a sad trial to Rose, who was now placed under a French governess, but she was soon cheered by the constant letters of Leonard, who wrote every other day, and she set to work to study hard, so that he might not be ashamed of her on his return.

The summer holidays soon came round, and the two children resumed their happy intimacy. Leonard had made his first Communion, and he began with the zeal of an apostle to prepare Rose for hers.

The old priest at Northcliffe, three miles off, was very hard worked and already infirm, and General Fortescue was a very negligent Catholic, so, but for the energetic efforts of the youthful baronet, the little girl's first Communion might very likely have been forgotten. He it was who helped her to examine her innocent conscience for her general confession, and walked with her to Northcliffe, in order that she might make it. He it was who drove her over in the pony-carriage the next morning to receive her first Communion. It was the third Sunday in September when Rose first received her Lord ; and there was something peculiarly appropriate in this, as she had been born on the Friday in Passion week, the day on which the Church commemorates the grief of that desolate Mother of an Incarnate God, and ever since babyhood she had manifested an extraordinary devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. Every day she recited the Rosary of the Seven Dolours, as taught by those true servants of Mary, the

Servite Fathers in Italy ; and each night she fell asleep with it wound about her arm. At the end of the holidays, Leonard returned to college, and Rose resumed her studies under her French instructress.

Years passed on, till Leonard was eighteen ; he then settled down at Fernleigh Manor till he came of age, when he took possession of Northcliffe Park and his father's estates. But the pleasant fraternal intercourse enjoyed by Rose during the four last years was scarcely broken, when he took up his abode at the Park ; he drove, walked, or rode over every day, and if he occasionally went abroad for a short time, or paid visits to his relations, he wrote, as before at school, every other day either to Rose or her father.

It would be hard to describe the feelings with which Rose at nineteen regarded her former playfellow ; he was her friend, brother, counsellor, and guide. She was in a painful and trying position for so young a girl ; three years before

the scene described in the last chapter, General Fortescue insisted on having his poor insane wife back again ; three or four rooms were entirely set apart for her and the two experienced attendants who had charge of her, and Rose, at her father's desire, spent some time every day trying to amuse her mother by singing and reading aloud. A little later, General Fortescue had a paralytic seizure, which deprived him of the use of his left arm and leg, and rendered all exertion difficult. Rose became his devoted nurse, anticipating his wishes in every possible way, and striving to make his life as pleasant as could be, under the circumstances. Happily for his daughter, General Fortescue's dislike had gradually melted away before the constant filial love of his only child. She was now the mistress of the house, and had the supervision of a large number of servants, both Catholic and Protestant. Added to her other trials, she had the very distressing cross of being, to a great extent, misunderstood by her confessor.

The Fortescues had the privilege of a private chapel, with the right of reserving the Blessed Sacrament, expressly granted to them by the Bishop before Rose's birth, and this privilege had never been withdrawn. On Sunday mornings, the second priest from Northcliffe came over to say Mass at nine, giving half an hour previously for confessions. He was a zealous man, but so over-worked from morning to night (as the senior priest, being old and infirm, could do little), that he could give but a short time for the direction of souls; moreover, he neither sympathized with, nor understood, the young girl's sensitive conscience, delicate almost to scrupulosity. It was to Leonard that Rose turned in all her difficulties; to him she made known her perplexities, her scruples, and her fears. Into his willing ears she poured the oft-repeated tale of the distressing scenes with her mother, her great anxiety about her father's spiritual state, her trials with the servants, and a thousand minor woes.

Leonard always listened patiently, sympathized most warmly, and gave real, solid advice in return. It was Leonard that taught her how to make meditation, and insisted on her going through that exercise for half an hour every day. It was Leonard who persuaded her to go to Confession and Communion once a fortnight. It was Leonard who made her promise to make a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Leonard, in fact, was her spiritual guide. The young man felt for her the kind affection of a brother ; he looked on her simply as a younger sister in a very difficult position, and he considered it at once a duty and a pleasure to make her hard life less melancholy and dull. But with Rose, the sisterly affection with which she had at first regarded him had long since, unknown to herself, ripened into a much warmer feeling, and it was his sympathy and kindness alone that made her present life at all bearable. Bright and innocent visions were entertained by her of a possible happiness, not far distant, and in those day-dreams

it was always Leonard that played the foremost part. It never entered her head to think that anything could separate them save death, 'And that,' thought Rose, 'must be a long way off, for we are both so young.'

Such was the state of things when Leonard returned from a short trip to Italy, and the young girl imagined that all would go on as before; but this is a world of change, poor little Rose, and soon, too soon, alas! the friendship on which you are leaning will suddenly cease, never to be resumed on earth. A dark cloud is gathering on the horizon of your life, a trial of which you dream not is close at hand. How will you meet it? How will you bear it? Oh! Mother of Sorrows, in that hour of tribulation, comfort and strengthen your child.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK had elapsed since Leonard's visit, and Rose was sitting in the drawing-room one afternoon; she was reclining in a low easy-chair, apparently in a pleasant day-dream, when the servant opened the door and announced :

‘ Miss Harrington.’

Rose sprang up at once, and greeted the young girl who entered with a friendly embrace and kind words. Edith Harrington returned her cousin's cordial welcome with seeming warmth, and the two young people sat down on the sofa together, and were soon deep in a pleasant conversation, recalling and laughing over many reminiscences of their childhood.

Edith Harrington had certainly great claims to be considered handsome; some indeed went so far as to call her lovely. Her features were almost faultless, her complexion perfect, her figure graceful, and yet there was a something wanting

which could scarcely be defined. Her large blue eyes, shaded with long dark eyelashes, had a strange cold glitter in them, that reminded one of the look of those dangerous serpents in distant lands : they fascinated, but repelled at the same time.

‘Oh, Edith, how lovely you have grown,’ said Rose innocently, as a pause in the conversation enabled her to take a calmer survey of her cousin. ‘You look as if you had suddenly stepped out of some old picture, into this common everyday world of ours.’

Edith drew up her swan-like neck, and cast a sidelong glance of gratified vanity at her own beautiful face, reflected in the mirror close at hand.

‘I am glad you approve of my looks, Rose,’ she said ; ‘but I am so used to admiration, that it is a wonder my head has not been turned long ago. I came out last season, and I assure you I made quite a sensation. Mamma was delighted ; but, after all, it is only what she anticipated for me ; she wants me to make

a good marriage soon, but I had rather have my liberty for a few years longer. A husband to obey and submit to all one's life would be very irksome, I think.'

'Most certainly it would be,' replied Rose, 'unless you married one whom you could really respect and love.'

'I never could respect anyone,' rejoined Edith carelessly. 'I suppose you will never marry, Rose; you look cut out for a single life.'

Her cousin coloured slightly as she answered :

'My duties lie here for the present. I have to look after my father, and amuse my poor mother. You would find it very dull, Edith.'

'I should not stand it for one hour, if I were you,' said Edith; 'you are wasting your time, caged up in this stupid country place, without society of any kind worth having.'

'Except Leonard,' interrupted Rose; 'he comes here every day.'

A peculiar and rather unpleasant expression passed over Edith's face.

‘So you see a great deal of Sir Leonard Vernon,’ she said; ‘he has been over to Farnborough Hall twice since I arrived; he is very rich, is he not?’

‘I really do not know,’ replied Rose; ‘it has never entered my head to think whether he is rich or poor.’

‘He is very pleasing,’ said Edith, fixing her cold blue eyes on her cousin’s face; ‘but he has one great fault—he is over-religious.’

‘Over-religious!’ echoed Rose. ‘Oh, Edith! can one ever be too religious?’

‘I do not admire it in young men,’ said Edith shortly; ‘let them leave it for monks and nuns. If ever I have much to do with Leonard Vernon, trust me, I shall change all that.’

‘Then I hope you will never have anything to do with him,’ said Rose indignantly. ‘I should consider it the greatest of misfortunes if Leonard were to lose one iota of his religious fervour; but he never will, I know him too well.’

‘You distrust my power,’ replied

Edith; 'wait and see, my dear cousin. All I want is to see Leonard more like an ordinary Christian, and not the devout saint he is at present. But patience, patience; time may work wonders.'

'Nothing will change him,' said Rose quickly. 'Edith, you must not talk in that way; it makes me feel as if some fiend had taken the form of my cousin, in order to torment and irritate me. Let us speak of something else, or rather, let me show you the house and our little chapel; you have not been over the place for twelve years.'

That night, long after the other inmates of the Manor had retired to rest, Rose paced up and down her room reciting the Rosary of the Seven Dolours. It was her favourite devotion; she had already repeated it once that day, but she felt strongly impelled to say it once more before she fell asleep. Leonard seemed to be in danger; Edith appeared to have formed some design on his religious faith and practices; what better plan could she devise for frustrating so

odious a scheme than to have recourse to *her*, who, in the beautiful words of the sainted Pius the Seventh, is 'the Anchor of confidence, the Shield of the oppressed, and the Terror of the treacherous.'

Happy indeed are they who, in all their troubles and afflictions, invoke the Mother of God, and appeal to her with the trustful love of a little child, for their appeal will not be made in vain. Thrice happy they who invoke her under the sweet title of Mother of Sorrows, for then indeed her Maternal Heart will refuse them nothing—nothing they ask for this life, or the next. Nevertheless, the Virgin most prudent sometimes foresees that the gift they crave may be injurious to their salvation ; then she obtains for them some greater grace, which, blinded mortals as they are, they perceived not they stood in need of—a grace which will increase their merits in this life, and add fresh jewels to the bright crowns they are destined to wear for all eternity.

CHAPTER V.

FEBRUARY with its frost and snow fled away, and March, with its blustering winds and gales was far advanced, when there came a succession of fine, bright spring days, genial and mild, such as we do occasionally enjoy even in the changeable climate of our sea-girt island home. The woods around were full of primroses and white and blue violets; all nature seemed gay, as if to herald the approach of the glorious Easter Festival.

It was the eve of the Friday on which the Church recalls the Dolours of the Mother of God, and Rose had been busy all the afternoon gathering flowers, and adorning the little chapel in honour of the feast day so dear to her warm Catholic heart. She was expecting Leonard to ride over, to arrange for her going to Northcliffe to hear Mass and receive Communion the next day; for General Fortescue had forbidden her walking over the fields alone, and every year it was Leonard who had escorted

her, so that she might not be deprived of the happiness of Communion on such a day. Evening came—no Leonard; night came—he did not appear; Rose grew a little anxious. At last, about half-past ten, the hall-door-bell rang, but it was not her adopted brother, but his servant with a note. She tore it open—it was written from Farnborough Hall, and was as follows:

‘DEAR ROSE,—

‘I am very sorry that important business keeps me from riding over to-night, in order to make arrangements about your hearing Mass at Northcliffe. I have ordered a carriage to be at the Manor by 7.30, and I shall meet you at the church, and we will go to Communion together as usual. I shall return and spend the day with you and your father afterwards. I have an interesting piece of news to tell you, which will, I am sure, make you happy, but I reserve it for to-morrow.

‘Your affectionate brother,

‘LEONARD VERNON.’

Rose was rather disappointed, but quickly recovered her spirits, thinking of her Communion on the following morning; she wondered also what the news could be that was to make her so happy. Bright anticipations of the joys, both spiritual and temporal, which awaited her on the morrow, kept her awake the first part of the night, but soon her weary eyelids closed, and she lost consciousness in sleep.

She was ready dressed when the carriage came the next day, and during the drive she recited her old favourite, the Rosary of the Dolours. Leonard met her at the door of the church.

‘I have arranged for your confession,’ he whispered; ‘be as quick as you can.’

Five minutes sufficed for the innocent confession of the young girl; Mass began, and when the bell for the ‘Domine non sum dignus’ sounded, Rose walked up to receive the Bread of Angels with the modesty and devotion of a religious, uniting her imperfect preparation and dispositions with those of the Blessed

Virgin in grief at the foot of the Cross. The half hour after her Communion had long past, and Leonard waited in vain—she moved not; at last he touched her hand. She started as if from a dream, saying :

‘Is it you, Leonard? I thought I was already in heaven. Oh, how sorry I am to come back to earth!’

‘I, too, am very sorry to disturb you,’ he said, ‘but General Fortescue will be vexed if we are late.’

‘Oh yes,’ she said, springing up; ‘let us go back at once.’

The drive was soon over, and the three sat down happily to breakfast. General Fortescue, feeling rather better, was in high spirits, Leonard was particularly cheerful, and as to Rose, the mere presence of her brother was sufficient to fill the cup of joy to the brim. The day passed on, and no allusion was made to the news mentioned in the letter received on the previous night. At last, quite late in the afternoon, Leonard announced rather suddenly that he had to

catch the six o'clock train to Farnborough; he was invited to the Hall for three days, he said.

'Will you walk down with me as far as the gate, Rose?' he added; 'I shall go across the fields to the station.'

She readily complied with his request, and they walked down the drive.

'I have something to tell you, little sister,' he said; then came a pause. Rose's heart beat fast; she felt frightened, though she scarcely knew why.

'I am engaged to be married,' he said; 'it was settled last night.'

Rose became pale as death; her heart seemed to turn to stone within her breast, as she said faintly:

'To whom?'

'Your cousin, Edith Harrington,' he answered; 'are you not glad, little sister?'

'A Protestant,' she said, trying to speak more steadily.

'Yes, a Protestant,' he answered; 'but one I shall hope, with the blessing of God, to convert very soon; I shall look

to you for help in this matter. But why do you look so strange, Rose? Are you not glad? Do you not congratulate me?’

She tried to say she congratulated him, but could not; she managed to say at last:

‘I wish you every happiness, may God bless you both;’ then she added, ‘You will miss your train, Leonard; you must go.’

‘Any message to Edith?’ he said, as he closed the gate.

She shook her head.

‘I will write to her to-morrow,’ she answered.

In another moment he was gone, and Rose was alone.

For a long time she stood there in the gathering twilight, almost stunned by the shock she had received.

Leonard married! and to Edith, to Edith, who had said, in speaking of his religious fervour, that she should change all that! The thought was almost more than she could bear. It was long before

she could bring herself to accept as inevitable the terrible blow, which would change the whole current of her life; then, when at last the full force of the truth stood out in all its stern reality before her eyes, a profound despair overwhelmed her soul, like to the deep shadow of night which was falling on the earth.

Mechanically she wended her way back to the house, and once again, as when a child, she turned into the little chapel, and sank down prostrate in an agony of grief before the statue of Our Lady of Dolours. Her sorrow was too deep for tears; she knelt there in silence, except for a low sobbing moan, like that of some wild animal in pain, which escaped her at intervals.

Rose laid her throbbing head against the cold marble pedestal, and tried to frame some words of prayer, but none came from her parched and quivering lips. She tried to say, 'Thy will be done,' but the rebel heart refused to bow to that Divine Will. The vivid imagination of the young girl was already occupied with

the future ; a long, dreary existence lay before her ; a life of trial and desolation ; a life without a friend, without sympathy, without Leonard. Long years to be passed alone, in the society of her poor insane mother and her paralyzed father ; an existence of seclusion and isolation till death.

Rose trembled and shrank back with horror from the gloomy fate that appeared to be her future lot, and lifting her sad eyes to that desolate Mother, transfixed with the sword of grief, she cried aloud, in her anguish and despair :

‘Mother of Sorrows, save me from such a life as this, or, at least, send me some friend, some comforter, to whom I may have recourse in this my hour of need.’

Evening gave place to night, and night to morning, ere the young girl moved from the position she had taken up before the statue of the Blessed Virgin. Tired and worn out, with heavy eyes and aching head, she at last became aware of the long hours she had passed

in the little chapel ; rising, she pressed her lips to that sweet Mother's feet, and with a heart still full of suffering, she left the sacred spot, to throw herself, dressed, upon her couch, not to sleep—that was impossible—but to rest, for a few hours, her stiff and weary limbs.

CHAPTER VI.

THE marriage of Leonard Vernon and Edith Harrington was to take place early in June, and at the wish of his betrothed, the young baronet consented that it should be celebrated in London.

On learning this, General Fortescue made up his mind to pay a visit of some months to the metropolis, partly to be on the spot when the wedding took place, and partly on account of his own health, as he wished to consult some of the best physicians in town.

Rose quietly entered into his plans: Fernleigh Manor was now an object of

indifference—the very country about presented another aspect : for her it had lost all its charms ; she was thankful to have, even for a time, a change of scene.

Accordingly, by the first of May the entire household was transferred to No. 3, Redcliffe Gardens. Rose, when consulted, had been perfectly careless as to the locality : all she stipulated for was to be near a Catholic church ; to her great relief she found that her new abode was within five minutes' walk of the Servite church. The good Fathers who work the mission are renowned for their devotion to the Dolours of Mary, and Rose soon found her way to the little Oratory, where the Blessed Virgin is represented with seven sharp swords piercing her Maternal and Virginal Heart.

The sorrowful girl had not yet learned resignation to the Divine Will, and though she performed all her duties with the same perfection, and showed her parents the same affectionate respect and attention, it was done with a heart

breaking with anguish, all the harder to bear that she was forced to keep it to herself. She had to listen constantly to her father's remarks on Edith's happy prospects ; she was obliged to endure the society of Edith herself, and to hear frequently the rejoicings of her young cousin's friends with an unmoved countenance.

Her mother's condition became every day more hopeless, and her father had surrounded himself with a small circle of old friends, most of whom were unhappily professed Atheists.

The eve of the wedding arrived, and as Rose looked at her pretty bridesmaid's dress, ready for the morrow, her whole heart revolted at the idea of being present at the ceremony. The prospect of having to hearken to those solemn words which were to bind Leonard and Edith together for life, to see their happiness, a happiness purchased at the cost of her own, seemed too cruel a torture to bear, and she felt tempted to write a note and plead some excuse. But before

she did so, she resolved to take counsel with the Blessed Virgin, and she hurried to the Oratory in the Servite church. There, as she imagined, hidden from human eyes, for the church appeared deserted, she again gave way to an uncontrollable burst of grief; sobs shook her delicate frame, and the great tears of agony streamed down her face.

It happened that one of the most saintly of the Servite Fathers, unseen by Rose, was pacing up and down the church reciting his Office. He soon perceived the young girl bowed down before the Blessed Virgin's statue, and saw at once that she was in trouble.

His Office finished, he came up behind her, and said, in accents of the most winning sympathy :

‘What is the matter, my poor child? Follow me into the confessional, and let me hear your tale of woe.’

The words, particularly the tone in which they were uttered, went to Rose's heart; she entered the confessional, and the long pent-up sorrow burst forth at last.

She disclosed the whole story of her life—her position with her parents, her childish trials, and her devotion to Our Lady of Dolours ; her love for Leonard and all he had been to her ; his engagement and approaching marriage ; the dreary life that lay before her, her anguish and despair, were all poured into the compassionate ear of this true servant of God.

He listened in silence to the long sad history, and when at last she paused for the first time, he said kindly :

‘ Poor child ! ’

Rose then spoke again of the wedding fixed for the next day, and of her repugnance to attending it, and how she had felt inclined to frame some excuse in order to escape it. Then the priest said gently :

‘ The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ? Child of the Seven Dolours, beloved child of a Mother consumed with grief, will you not drink to the dregs the cup of suffering offered you by a Father’s hand ? The

Mother of God stood in her anguish at the foot of the Cross, watching the dread crucifixion of her Divine Son to the very end, and will you shrink back before your sacrifice is consummated? Favoured client of Mary in sorrow, she has obtained for you the greatest grace. For others, her loving children, she obtains a crown of roses, the emblem of the joys of this life; for *you* she reserves the *crown of thorns*. For many she lightens their burdens and eases the yoke. On your shoulder she places the hard, heavy cross. Some she calls to walk on smooth, soft paths; *you* she summons to climb, side by side with her, the steep hill of Calvary, and to stand near her at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ. Like your blessed Mother, you are to undergo, not corporal martyrdom, but a spiritual torture far harder to bear. Child of the Seven Dolours, will you refuse to share your Mother's privilege of suffering? Consider that it will not be for ever; soon, very soon, you will lay down the cross to receive the martyr's palm, you

will exchange the thorny crown for the bright diadem of glory, and the path of suffering, the road to Calvary, will end in eternal joy. Say, poor little one, will you not resign yourself to this trial cheerfully, lovingly? Will you not also consecrate this warm and affectionate heart of yours to God, Who alone is worthy of the love of an immortal soul?’

There was a pause, till the young girl answered quietly and firmly :

‘ Father, I accept this cross, and I wish to resign myself entirely to the Will of God.’

‘ Make, then,’ said the priest, ‘ an act of will by which you sacrifice for ever that which has hitherto formed your happiness on earth—your adopted brother and your affection for him—and offer it to the Blessed Virgin for the preservation of his faith and fervour, as well as for the conversion of your cousin Edith.’

There was again an interval of silence ; then she said :

‘ It is done, Father.’

‘ My child,’ he rejoined, ‘ God will

reward you for your docility. Go to-morrow to this marriage, and endeavour to add to the happiness of the newly wedded couple by the cheerfulness and serenity of your countenance and words. Later on in the week come back to me again. In the name of the Blessed Virgin I take upon myself the care of your soul and its eternal welfare. Go in peace, and may God bless you.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE wedding was over; the breakfast had taken place, and Leonard and his lovely bride, radiant with happiness, had started on a three months' tour through Italy and Switzerland. The guests had dispersed, and the little world at Redcliffe Gardens settled down again into their usual ways.

As time went on, Rose found that a new life had opened before her. General Fortescue, surrounded by his friends,

required her less, so that several hours not devoted to her poor mother, were at the young girl's disposal.

Under the prudent guidance of her Director, Rose began to visit the distressed poor in the neighbourhood, and she was soon looked upon by her humble friends as a ministering angel. At all hours of the day she might be seen threading her way through the narrow streets and crowded alleys of the district, on some errand of mercy and love. The ready oath, the blasphemous word, was arrested on the lips of the rough men who stood idling about on the approach of the 'good young lady,' as they called her. The cruel arm of some brutal husband, uplifted to strike his down-trodden wife, fell harmless by his side as Rose drew near, and with a few gentle words of admonition, peace would be established between the angry couple. Fights and quarrels ceased as if by magic wherever Rose passed, and a glimpse of her sweet calm face, as she entered some low court, would often cause a general

exodus from the public-house near at hand.

Sunday after Sunday Rose made the round of her district, and persuaded the Catholic men and women to go and hear Mass at the Servite Church. In many cases, when a sick child or a troublesome baby was the excuse with the poor mothers for neglecting that sacred obligation, Rose took their place by the bedside or the cradle whilst they were away. When any of her humble friends were ill, Rose visited them every day, brought them medicine to ease their pain, dressed their sores, bathed their aching heads, soothed them with kind words of sympathy, and fed them with her own hands. She leant tenderly over the pillow of the dying, wiped the death-sweat from their brow, spoke to them of Heaven, and prepared them for receiving the last Sacraments. She collected together the little wild ragged children who played about the streets, and instructed them for their first confession and Communion.

It was her delight to visit one or two of the large hospitals in London, to see after the poor Catholic patients, and to bring some good priest to their side to absolve them and prepare them for death. She even obtained leave to go and speak occasionally to the Catholic inmates of the Convict Prison at Fulham, and many owed their conversion to this young innocent girl, who, with winning tenderness, urged them to return to God. It was in the sad and sorrowful that Rose felt the deepest interest, and her accents were never so sweet, nor her words so eloquent, as when she sat side by side with some poor wretched creature, brought to the verge of desperation by sin and misery. At least, if she could not comfort she would weep with them, but it was seldom that her words brought no relief.

In her own home Rose continued her labour of love with her parents; she sat by her mother's side hour after hour, devising a thousand ways of amusing the invalid, always cheerful, always affectionate, never weary of what would have

been to so many daughters an irksome duty.

‘It is far worse for her,’ Rose used to say, when anyone ventured to pity her lot and to compare her life with those of other girls of the same age. Her charity extended itself to the servants of the house: she watched over them with almost a mother’s care, saw that the Catholic ones had time to frequent the Sacraments, and soon, under the gentle sway of their young mistress, the whole tone of the house changed, and the servants became, with a few exceptions, really practical good Christians, obedient and faithful to their employers, and charitable and united amongst themselves.

Rose laboured to bring back her father to the practice of his religious duties, but hitherto all her efforts had been in vain. She succeeded only in persuading him to discourage the visits of several of his most unbelieving friends, and now and then he would receive the Servite Fathers, and listen courteously to their zealous

admonitions. Further than this he would not go ; so Rose waited and prayed, hoping against hope that all would come right in the end. The young girl grew thin and pale, but she never complained, and there was no one who imagined she could be suffering, except her saintly Director, who alone knew of the struggle going on within her soul, and saw with regret its effect on her health.

Since Leonard's marriage, Rose heard occasionally from her brother ; at first his letters conveyed the impression that he was in the enjoyment of unmitigated happiness ; he frequently mentioned his wife, and always with much affection. Later on, however, her name occurred less often, and at last he ceased to allude to her altogether, confining himself for the most part to descriptions of the scenery in the different places they passed through. The quick instinct of Rose detected at once the altered tone of his letters ; she saw he was not happy, and the thought of his trouble opened the flood-gates of her own sorrow afresh.

It was well for her that she did not know all that her brother was suffering, when the veil dropped from his eyes and the real character of Edith was manifested to him at last. Who can paint the anguish of his soul, when he realized the fearful mistake he had made in his marriage, and knew that it was irremediable? He was united to a woman without faith, without truth, without affection—a woman whose only religion was the worship of self—one whom he could not respect, and therefore could not love. Who can describe the still greater bitterness of his heart when he discovered the base object she had in view when she accepted his hand? She had become his wife simply to destroy his faith and virtue; she was bent on his embracing the false religion to which she herself nominally belonged, and she used every art, and seized hold of every opportunity, to undermine that devotion which had grown up naturally in the pure soul of her Catholic husband. One thing alone could have increased his

trouble, and that was, if Rose had been the constant witness of his miserable life. He shrunk from the thought of returning to England, and above all to Northcliffe Park; he therefore proposed to Edith to pass the winter at Mentone, and then to revisit Paris, before returning to their native land. His wife gladly consented, and Leonard announced in his next letter to General Fortescue his intention of remaining abroad, without giving any clue as to the reason of his so doing.

CHAPTER VIII.

MONTHS passed away, Lent arrived once more, and the beautiful Feast of Our Lady of Dolours came round again; the anniversary of the day on which Rose had first heard the news of Leonard's engagement. She made a general confession early that morning to her good

Director, and received from his hands the Bread of Angels. Later on in the day he went to call at the house in Redcliffe Gardens, desiring to wish her a happy feast. He found the servants in great confusion.

‘What has happened?’ he asked of the butler.

‘The General has just received some very sad news, sir; the young baronet, Sir Leonard Vernon, has been thrown from his horse and killed on the spot.’

‘Where?’ said the priest.

‘In the Bois de Boulogne, in Paris, sir,’ answered the man. ‘Here is the telegram.’

The Father took the paper and read :

From

LADY VERNON.

To

MISS FORTESCUE.

‘Leonard was thrown from his horse this morning whilst riding in the Bois de Boulogne, and was taken up dead. The funeral will take place at Northcliffe.’

‘ Will the General see me ? ’ asked the priest.

‘ I am afraid not, sir, but I will inquire.’

The butler, after an absence of two or three minutes, returned, saying :

‘ My master will be glad if you can call again in the afternoon.’

‘ I will return most certainly,’ said the priest. ‘ Where is Miss Fortescue ?’

‘ She is gone to the church, sir, I fancy. She left the house after breaking the news to the General.’

The good Father left and went straight to the church ; he knew where he should find her, and his instinct had not deceived him : she was kneeling in the chapel of Our Lady of Dolours. She was on the step of the chapel, leaning her clasped hands on the altar-rail, her head thrown back a little, her eyes fixed on the statue of her Immaculate Mother. She heard not the step of the kind priest, she did not appear to be aware of his presence. The Father bent forward to see her face, but to his astonishment

there was no trace of grief, no mark of tears. Her countenance, though very pale, wore an expression of the most heavenly peace and calm ; a sweet smile seemed to play about her parted lips. She remained motionless and still : she did not even seem to breathe.

A sudden idea struck the priest. He went up and spoke to her ; she took no notice. He touched her hand ; it was icy cold. He felt her pulse ; there was none. Rose was dead ; she had quitted earth for heaven ; her spiritual martyrdom was over. The thorny crown she had worn so patiently was no longer pressing on her head ; it had been changed for a diadem of glory. She had laid down the cross she had taken up so bravely, and now she bore the martyr's palm. The sharp rugged way of suffering had ended, as the Servite Father had predicted, in eternal joy. The holy priest knelt by her side and recited the ' Magnificat,' in thanksgiving for her innocent and holy life, crowned, as he felt convinced it had been, by the death of the Saints.

A week later, and Rose was laid in her quiet grave in the little Catholic cemetery at Northcliffe; two days more saw the family vault of the Vernons opened to receive the body of Leonard, her adopted brother, and many and bitter were the tears shed over both their tombs by the desolate father of the young girl. The good Servite priest, anxious to learn if the generous sacrifice Rose had made of her happiness on earth had been accepted by Almighty God in behalf of her brother and cousin, wrote as soon as he had time to one of the Jesuit Fathers, at the Rue de Sèvres, whom he knew to have been Leonard's intimate friend and confessor, to make inquiries about the young man. The Père B—— wrote the following answer :

‘I can speak only in terms of the highest praise of Leonard Vernon. Without any exaggeration on my part, his was the most innocent soul I ever came across since I became a priest. I doubt very much if he ever lost the grace of

his baptism. His young wife, and the circle of friends with whom she surrounded herself, both here and at Mentone, endeavoured in every possible way to make shipwreck of his faith; but he passed unscathed through the fiery ordeal. Never for one day did he give up any religious practice; never did he lose one iota of his extraordinary fervour and devotion. The morning of his death I heard his confession, and he received Communion in the chapel of the Martyrs of the Commune. Three hours later he was carried home dead to his hotel. When I consider what his life was, I feel more inclined to recite the "Te Deum" than the 'De Profundis.' You will be glad to hear that Lady Vernon, having given up the idea of returning to England for the present, has placed herself under instruction, and will, I hope, before long be received into the Church. Her husband's death has made a deep impression on her mind, and has induced her to think more seriously about her soul than she has ever done before.'

The wishes of the Père B—— were speedily realized, for three months later Edith Vernon received conditional baptism, and began a life of sincere and edifying piety. Her example was quickly followed by the conversion of General Fortescue, who returned to the practice of those religious duties he had for so many years neglected. At the earnest request of Lady Vernon, on her return to Northcliffe Park, her uncle and aunt came to live with her, and by her loving care and affection she endeavoured to become all that Rose had once been to her father and mother.

Thus the sacrifice made by the young girl had not been made in vain; it had obtained the eternal salvation of Leonard, and not only the conversion of Edith, but that of her own father. Of Leonard and Rose it might be said that their bright examples and holy and edifying lives and deaths had not been thrown away. Both had in their different spheres responded to the high graces accorded to them, and fulfilled the designs of their

Creator in their regard. Both had died the death of the just. Now they stand in the eternal sunlight of God's presence, in that paradise of heavenly delights which shall never have an end. Both had been faithful unto death, and both had now received the crown of life.

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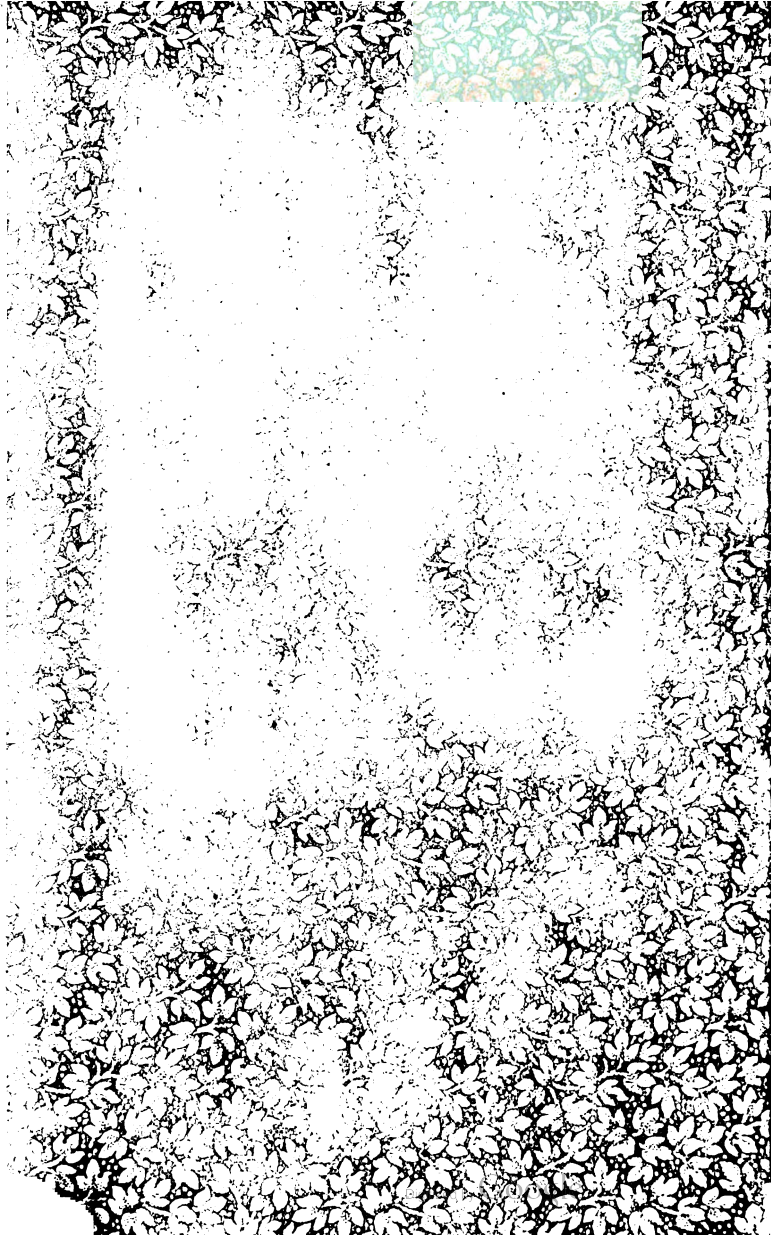
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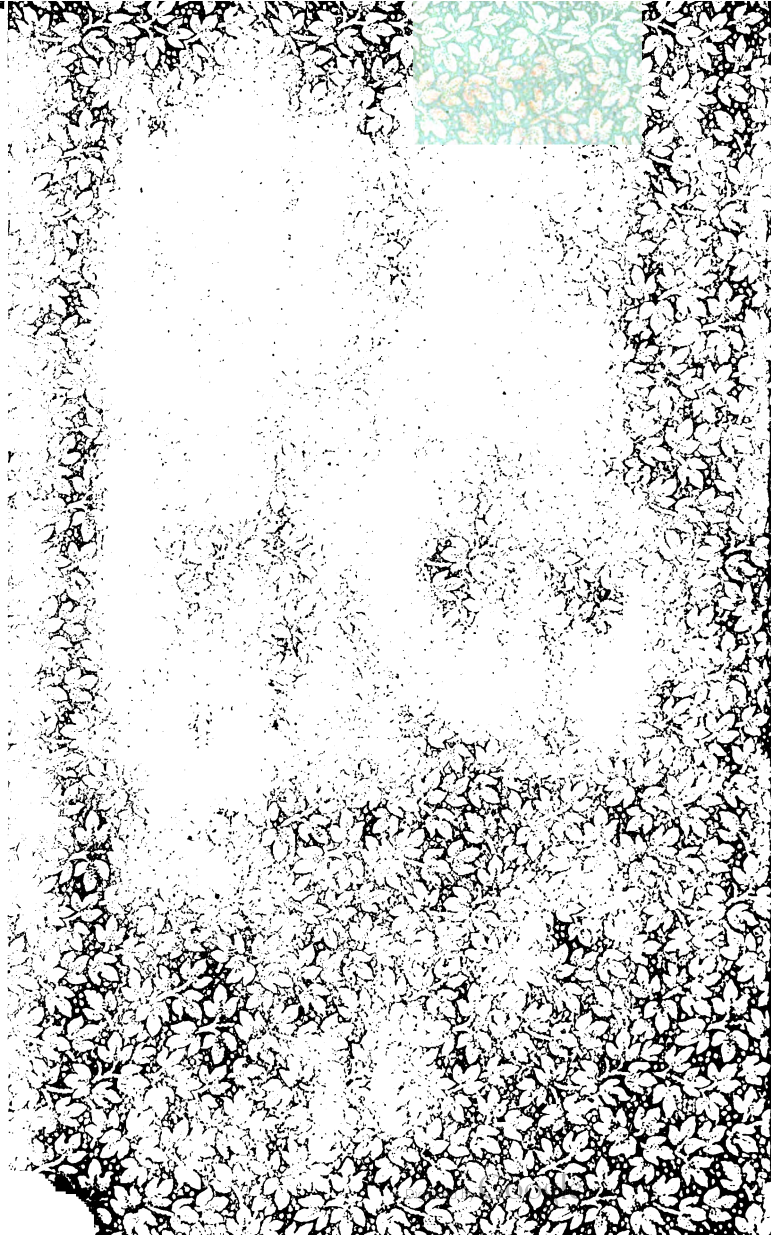
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